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RECREATIONAL AND CULTURAL OPPORTUNITIES.

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RECREATIONAL AND CULTURAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR MOST RURAL YOUTH ARE CENTERED AROUND SCHOOLS, BUT WITH INCREASING EMPHASIS ON ACADEMIC SUBJECTS THE STUDENTS ARE BEING DEPRIVED OF OPPORTUNITIES TO PARTICIPATE IN CERTAIN ACTIVITIES FOR ENJOYMENT ONLY. SUGGESTIONS INCLUDE TAKING THE PERFORMING ARTS TO THE RURAL AREAS, PLANNING ART FESTIVALS THAT WOULD INCLUDE PLAYS, CONCERTS, AND ART SHOWS, AND DEVELOPING RECREATION CENTERS AT THE SCHOOLS, WITH STAFFS TO COORDINATE PROGRAMS AND PROVIDE INSTRUCTION. THE MOST IMPORTANT NEED IS LEADERS WHO HAVE THE ENTHUSIASM TO BUILD A DESIRE IN YOUTH TO BE PARTICIPANTS INSTEAD OF SPECTATORS. THIS SPEECH WAS PRESENTED AT THE NATIONAL OUTLOOK CONFERENCE ON RURAL YOUTH, OCTOBER 23-26, 1967, WASHINGTON, D. C., SPONSORED JOINTLY BY THE U. S. DEPARTMENTS OF AGRICULTURE, HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE, INTERIOR, AND LABOR, OEO, AND THE PRESIDENT'S COUNCIL ON YOUTH OPPORTUNITY. (SF)

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Special Session on Quality
of Living for Rural Youth

Speech presented at
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RECREATIONAL AND CULTURAL OPPORTUNITIES

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Modern technology and affluence are making it possible for the working adult to have more leisure time to spend in recreational or cultural pursuits. This is not the story for the youth of our Nation.

The center of any youth's life is his school activities. Often their only contact with cultural and recreational activities are the extra-curricular programs that are fast disappearing from our rural schools. Since many of the rural schools have been centralized into larger units, and since more emphasis is being placed on the academic subjects, little time is left for the student to participate in group activities for the sheer enjoyment of self. It is becoming very difficult to obtain teaching personnel that is talented in the cultural aspects of education for rural schools. They, too, want to be where they can enjoy the professionals in arts.

Since I am representing the Future Homemakers of America, I would like to tell you what our organization is doing to provide cultural and recreational activities for club members. In my State of West Virginia our state officers decided that this lag in our activities needed caring for. With the aid of the state staff members, a program, centered around recreation, was presented to the delegates at the state convention. In this program, hints on how to be a good leader, what activities to use, and how to work such activities into the time alloted were presented. It is expected that if each club follows their plan, an activity will be carried out each month. This will offer leadership training and active participation to each member.

On the National level, our annual convention includes one night of entertainment. This will vary from performances by leading broadway actors, to light opera, to concerts. For many this is the first opportunity to see such performances.

These activities are fine for a few of the rural youth, but they cannot return to their groups and actually convey their experienced emotions to the many that did not share in their opportunity.

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Rena Beldon

For the next few minutes I would like to share with you some ideas that might improve the cultural and recreational life of those who do not leave their homes.

As always libraries are still needed. These could be in the form of bookmobiles or branches from nearby town or county libraries.

Take the performing arts to the rural areas. This, of course, would include several steps. First, educate the youth to appreciate the finer arts by providing not only classes in these areas but also opportunities to participate in choral, instrumental, and drama groups. Then, send performers into these areas who understand the problems and who are willing to devote their time to explaining as well as performing their art.

This could possibly be done similar to the science exhibitions sponsored by private industries, that travel to various schools and communities. Another possible method would be planning art festivals that would include such things as plays, concerts, and art shows.

Another suggestion that would greatly benefit the whole community is recreation centers. True, many communities, as did my own, developed recreation centers at the schools during the summer, this isn't enough. What we need are recreation complexes that will include a recreation hall, a swimming pool, a picnic area, tennis, horseshoe, schuffleboard, and basketball courts, and baseball diamonds. These centers would have a permanent staff whose job would be to coordinate various programs and provide instruction in the various activities. This staff would not necessarily have to be professional recreation leaders. I have found that the best way to get and keep people interested in programs of this type is to let them have an active part in the planning and the administration of the program. Naturally, key positions would have to be filled by personnel who would act as supervisors. These would be aided by talented youth of the community who would be paid a small amount for their services. It would also be my suggestion to form youth advisory councils to participate in the planning of special programs. These centers would be the ideal place to form drama clubs, choruses, and bands to perform for the community.

The most important need is leadership. Youth of today are dependent on radio, television, and movies for entertainment. We need leaders who are enthusiastic enough and interested enough to work with us and build a desire in us to be participants instead of idle spectators. For this, unfortunately, I have no diagramed plan of action.

These are but suggestions. We along with other interested people must take the initiative in promoting these and other programs. The need and interest is there, all we need to do is develop it.